

In The Spotlight – We Know Where, but When Did It All Begin?

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The history of the Hash House Harriers has been a topic of great interest for many years, but the one question that still makes us ponder is . . . WHEN did it start? Like many things we do in hashing, there is usually some sort of punchline, or bawdy humor involved, and this is no exception. Hashers have been asking this question for many years, but most take it for granted that it was sometime in 1938. Yet there is no known document that gives us a clear understanding, or so we thought. I became interested in the date after attending the Mother Hash 75th anniversary in 2013, and started with the simple math, reviewing the dates of key events.

We have documents that clearly state that the 100th run for the Hash House Harriers was 15 Aug 1941, and run #117 was on 12 Dec 41. This shows that by that point the hash was run on a weekly basis (and was on Friday evenings prior to the war). So, counting backwards 99 weeks from 15 Aug, the math does not work out for weekly runs unless the HHH started in Sep 1939. Bi-weekly does not add up very well either, unless they shifted from biweekly to weekly sometime in mid to late 1940. Otherwise, there must have been a multitude of missed runs to put the start date in 1938. Obviously, I am not the only one who has come to this conclusion.

Colin “Snowman” Snow started hashing with Mother Hash in Jan 1976, and through a by-chance occurrence, found himself finishing out the 1977 term of the vacant ON-SEC position. That was followed up with a full term as Joint Master in 1978. Colin took to hashing quickly, and even back then the question lingered as to when was the first run? Well, one day in Mid-1980, Colin mentioned to John Duncan (who had been the ON-SEC and JM back in the 1960s), that he was traveling to Africa. John boldly directed “If you are going to Africa, you must look up Torch Bennett.” This led to a most unexpected journey documented by Colin in his article “Checking In Africa – An Evening with Torch Bennett.”

[<https://www.gotothefhash.net/history/torch/CheckingInAfrica.pdf>] While most of this conversation was published many years ago, one of the big questions that Colin wanted to know, was discussed but not included.

Like many British expats on assignment, Colin had moved around over the years. Malaysia in the 70s, with follow on jobs in several places including Taiwan and Thailand. Now retired, he makes his home in Bangkok. I first met Colin somewhere in SE Asia about 20 years ago, and we have occasionally crossed paths on some of my hash excursion through the region. While recently discussing another bit of hash trivia, he mentioned to me . . . “If you want to add to the historical confusion of Run no 1, I had an extended exchange by airmail letters with Torch Bennett, back in 1980/81, the original Hon Sec.” He added that “I had found Torch Bennett in Durban, RSA back circa 1981 in one of the most unlikely small world stories, I must dig it up & send it on to you. That led to an airmail exchange twixt me & Torch until he moved on to the Big Rubber Plantation overhead about 1993, which included those 2 letters from Torch which you now have copies. John Duncan was also copied but by agreement of the 3 of us, nobody else.” You can bet I was very interested to read these letters!

Why now is this coming to light you may ask? Colin explained that “I was conscious that since Torch & John Duncan had moved on, then I alone had those letters from Torch Bennett, & was it now time to publish them.” After reading, and rereading these letters, many bits of history have some context, including discussion of the date of origin. Torch stated “Around May/June 1938 I was in Malacca with “G” who was office manager and with him ran with the Springgit Harriers there. I returned to K.L., went off on leave about late November and “G” was still in Malacca, so H3

definitely did not start in 1938.” Now my original question about counting backwards from run #100, and was it weekly, ties in . . . Torch states in his letter that “. . . the runs were always weekly and never abandoned for bad light or weather.” He also mentioned that a small few runs may have been missed due to holidays, such as Christmas, New Years, and Easter. Torch continued, stating “I returned from leave late July 1939 to find “G” manager of the K.L. office and H3 in action, and have always felt that I got back in time for the 4th or 5th run.” Then Torch makes the grand conclusion that “I think I can now pinpoint it as far as the month is concerned, and I make it July 1939.”

Now, I will remind the readers, that these letters were written back in the summer of 1981. Why has this information been withheld for so long? In typical hash fashion, Colin tells me “At the time we were concerned that if the 1939 start date became common knowledge we (Mother HHH) would have to recall several thousand HHH Tee Shirts inscribed ‘Running since 1938.’ And that was after HHH had had its glorious 40th anniversary PU [piss up] on 23 September 1978, when I was a JM.” Can you believe it . . . what a story! It was all about the printed T-shirts. 😊

Colin, now in his 80s, went on to explain that . . . “Torch came up with the wonderful concept that by Chinese counting we are aged one at birth. Hence HHH could have been conceived circa Sep 1938, with birth 9 months later in June 1939 with Run No1, near enough matching Torch's memory. We 3 agreed that this be kept quiet & be allowed to merge into Oriental myth. This history remained slumbering until I became concerned that if/when I pop off then that HHH history would be lost forever.”

More to follow on other historical points from Torch . . . On On.